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NOVEMBER 22, 2024

Creating Safe Schools for LGBTQ+ Youth

Core Competencies for Professional Development

AT A GLANCE

- By understanding how sexual orientation and gender identity differ, school staff can create welcoming school environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) youth.
- Teachers and staff need to know about factors that can cause harm and factors that prevent health risks.

ON THIS PAGE

Overview

Learning objective 1: describe t...

Learning objective 2: identify he...

Learning objective 3: recognize ...

Learning objective 4: implemen...

Success story

Resources

Overview

Did you know?

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) youth are more likely than non-LGBTQ+ youth to experience violence at school and have lower levels of school connectedness.

It is a best practice for teachers and other school staff to receive professional development (PD) on how to support LGBTQ+ youth. Consequently, teachers and staff can improve safety and

connectedness in schools for both LGBTQ+ youth and their cisgender, heterosexual peers.

Learning objective 1: describe the basics

It's important to know how sexual orientation and gender identity are defined, and how the two differ. This is the first step in building a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ youth.

By knowing and applying these concepts, teachers and other school staff can help LGBTQ+ youth feel more welcomed at school.

Sexual Orientation

- Define sexual orientation.
- Describe the diversity of sexual orientation among adolescents and young adults.
- Describe how sexual orientation is formed and evolves during adolescence.

Gender Identity

- Define gender identity.
- Describe the diversity of gender identity among adolescents and young adults.
- Describe how gender identity is formed and evolves during adolescence.

Inclusive Language

- Describe the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Identify appropriate language, including affirming pronouns, when talking to or about LGBTQ+ youth.

Keep Reading:
Basic Concepts and Terminology Related to LGBTQ+ Youth

Learning objective 2: identify health disparities and their root causes

LGBTQ+ youth face stigma and discrimination that put them at increased risk for negative health outcomes. Examples are poor mental health and substance use.

It's helpful for teachers and other school staff to know what places LGBTQ+ youth at higher risk for negative health outcomes. Teachers and staff then know how to work to mitigate these health disparities.

Discrimination and Stress

- Describe how stigma, discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions affect LGBTQ+ youth.
- Describe how these negative experiences influence the psychological and physical stress levels of LGBTQ+ youth.

Health Risks and Disparities

- Define sexual health, mental health, substance use, and violence.
- Describe how LGBTQ+ youth disproportionately experience negative outcomes.
- Identify the role of discrimination and stress in shaping negative health outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth.

Keep Reading:
Health Disparities That Disproportionately Effect LGBTQ+ Youth

Learning objective 3: recognize the influence of school environments

Being in a healthy, supportive school environment can help LGBTQ+ students thrive and lessen some health disparities. Teachers and other school staff

should know which factors in schools could cause harm and which could help prevent health risks.

Risk Factors in Schools

- Define risk factors.
- Identify risk factors that primarily occur in school environments.
- Describe how school-based risk factors affect LGBTQ+ youth.

Protective Factors in Schools

- Define protective factors.
- Identify protective factors that primarily occur in school environments.
- Describe how school-based protective factors affect LGBTQ+ youth.

Keep Reading:

Effect School Environments Have on LGBTQ+ Youth

Learning objective 4: implement supportive policies and practices

Teachers and school staff can promote positive changes in the school environment. In this way, they can address health disparities and help LGBTQ+ youth thrive in schools. Policies and practices can be implemented by individual teachers, or throughout the broader school community.

Curricula

- Describe how inclusive language and content in curricula can positively affect LGBTQ+ youth.
- Identify characteristics of inclusive curricula.

School Policies

- Identify examples of LGBTQ+ inclusive school policies.
- Describe how school staff can enact change in their school communities.

Keep Reading:
School-Based Guidelines and Practices for LGBTQ+ Youth

Success story

From 2015 to 2017, the American Psychological Association (APA) worked with education agencies on an in-person professional development (PD) workshop. They developed the RESPECT Workshop—to support LGBTQ+ students—with CDC support.

State education agencies in Illinois, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Vermont participated in data collection before and after the workshops. After the workshop, 100% of survey respondents reported

promoting school policies, programs, and practices for a safe and supportive school environment.

These respondents reported significant increases in knowledge, skills, and confidence in their abilities to:

- Promote safe school environments.
- Motivate students to prevent HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy.
- Help LGBTQ+ students cope with challenges.

See also

Success Stories

Learn about the communities CDC funds and their program successes.

Resources

- Advocates for Youth | *Creating Safer Spaces for LGBTQ Youth* PDF. Toolkit for education, health care, and community-based organizations.
- American Psychological Association | RESPECT Workshop. Workshop for in-school support professionals.

- CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health | *LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools: A Self-Assessment Tool.* PDF Resource for school staff to assess their inclusivity practices.
- GLSEN | Professional Development. Toolkits, webinars, and workshops for educators.
- GLSEN | Safe Space Kit. Implementation resource on establishing safe spaces.
- GLSEN | Changing the Game: For Adults. Resource on making sports more inclusive for students.
- Human Rights Campaign | Creating Safe and Welcoming Schools. Bias-based bullying prevention program for educators (and others serving youth) providing LGBTQ+ and gender inclusive PD training, lesson plans, booklists, and resources.
- Los Angeles LGBT Center | Out for Safe Schools Campaign. PD program to foster safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth.
- National Center for Lesbian Rights, Gender Spectrum, Human Rights Campaign, ACLU | *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K–12 Schools* PDF. Resource guide for supporting transgender students in schools.

SOURCES SHARE

Safe Supportive Environments

Safe and supportive environments in schools includes emphasizing aspects of the school environment to support students to be more engaged and feel connected.

View All

About

Positive Youth Development

Gay-Straight/Genders and Sexualities Alliances

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Parental Monitoring and Communication
Inclusive Practices Help All Students Thrive

Communication Resources

Creating Safe Schools for LGBTQ+ Youth

Measuring the Effects of Professional Development

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